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SINCE 1828



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# obtain

[verb](#)

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ob·tain | \ əb-'tān , äb- \  
obtained; obtaining; obtains

## Definition of *obtain*

[transitive verb](#)

: to gain or attain usually by planned action or effort The information was difficult to obtain. We obtained a copy of the original letter.


[intransitive verb](#)


1 : to be generally recognized or established : [prevail](#) Those ideas no longer obtain for our generation. a greater degree of free expression than usually obtains in film production— Roger Manvell

2 archaic : [succeed](#)


[Other Words from \*obtain\*](#) [Synonyms & Antonyms](#) [Did you know?](#) [More Example Sentences](#) [Learn More About \*obtain\*](#)

## Other Words from *obtain*

obtainability | \ əb-,tā-nə-'bi-lə-tē , äb- \ noun

obtainable \ əb-'tā-nə-bəl , äb- \ adjective

obtainer noun

obtainment \ əb-'tān-mənt , äb- \ noun

## Synonyms & Antonyms for *obtain*

### Synonyms

- [acquire](#),
- [attain](#),
- [bag](#),
- [bring in](#),
- [capture](#),
- [carry](#),
- [come by](#),
- [draw](#),
- [earn](#),
- [gain](#),
- [garner](#),
- [get](#),
- [knock down](#),
- [land](#),
- [make](#),
- [procure](#),
- [pull down](#),
- [realize](#),
- [reap](#),
- [secure](#),
- [win](#)

### Antonyms

- [forfeit](#),
- [lose](#)

[Visit the Thesaurus for More](#) 

## Did you know?

*Obtain*, which was adopted into English in the 15th century, comes to us via Anglo-French from the Latin *obtinēre*, meaning "to hold on to, possess." *Obtinēre* was itself formed by the combination of *ob-*, meaning "in the way," and the verb *tenēre*, meaning "to hold." In its earliest uses, *obtain* often implied a conquest or a successful victory in battle, but it is now used for any attainment through planned action or effort. The verb *tenēre* has incontestably prevailed in the English language, providing us with such common words as [abstain](#), [contain](#), [detain](#), [sustain](#), and, perhaps less obviously, the adjectives [tenable](#) and [tenacious](#).

## Examples of *obtain* in a Sentence

The information may be difficult to *obtain*. We *obtained* a copy of the original letter. These ideas no longer *obtain* for our generation.

Recent Examples on the Web The Kytch founders argued in that lawsuit that Taylor worked with TFG and one franchise owner to stealthily *obtain* a Kytch device, reverse-engineer it, and attempt to copy its features. — Andy

Greenberg, *Wired*, 2 Mar. 2022 As a result of these directives, families like the Does have been exposed immediately to such investigations—including surprise home visits from CPS and efforts to *obtain* their confidential medical records. — Melissa Gira Grant, *The New Republic*, 1 Mar. 2022 The drive redefined Stafford as a champion in the clutch one year after the Rams traded three draft picks and their previous starting quarterback to *obtain* him from the Detroit Lions. — Brent Schrottenboer, *USA TODAY*, 14 Feb. 2022 [See More](#)

These example sentences are selected automatically from various online news sources to reflect current usage of the word 'obtain.' Views expressed in the examples do not represent the opinion of Merriam-Webster or its editors. [Send us feedback.](#)

## First Known Use of *obtain*

15th century, in the meaning defined at [transitive sense](#)

## History and Etymology for *obtain*

Middle English *obteinen*, from Anglo-French & Latin; Anglo-French *obtenir*, from Latin *obtinēre* to hold on to, possess, obtain, from *ob-* in the way + *tenēre* to hold — more at [thin](#)

## Learn More About *obtain*

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Time Traveler for *obtain*



## The first known use of *obtain* was in the 15th century

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Last Updated

14 Mar 2022

Look-up Popularity

Top 1% of words

Cite this Entry

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More Definitions for *obtain*

obtain

verb

ob·tain | \ əb-'tān  \

obtained; obtaining

## Kids Definition of *obtain*

: to gain or get hold of with effort She was able to *obtain* a ticket to the show. We *obtained* permission to enter.

More from Merriam-Webster on *obtain*

Nglish: [Translation of \*obtain\* for Spanish Speakers](#)

Britannica English: [Translation of \*obtain\* for Arabic Speakers](#)

### WORD OF THE DAY

nascent 

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sagacity

blatherskite

folderol

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## WORDS AT PLAY

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### Words of the Week - March 18

- From the week ending 3/18/2022

### 30 Ways to Tell the Future

Let us know if any of these work

- for you

### Is it 'St. Patty's Day' or 'St. Paddy's Day'?

- 

### Clever Insults

Flummox your foes with the finest

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## ASK THE EDITORS

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### 'Everyday' vs. 'Every Day'

A simple trick to keep them

- separate



## What Is 'Semantic Bleaching'?

How 'literally' can mean

- "figuratively"

## Literally

How to use a word that (literally)

- drives some pe...

## Is Singular 'They' a Better Choice?

- The awkward case of 'his or her'

## WORD GAMES

### Great Words for Scrabble

Words to improve your Scrabble game

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